

Report Date

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Site Visit Date

June 18th, 2021

Submitted By

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L.Liparini Studio ♦ Third Coast Conservation, LLC (LTC)

To

Sarah Lindgren, Public Art Administrator

Office of Advanced Planning & Sustainability

Department of Develop Louisville

LOUISVILLE FORWARD

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Louisville, KY 41202

Project

Conservation Assessment of the statue of
Louis XVI (1754-1793, King of France 1774-1793)
By Achille-Joseph-Etienne Valois (1785-1862)



Left: Courier Journal File Photo during the unveiling in 1967 at the original location

Middle: Statue at corner of 6th and Jefferson since 1973, prior to deinstallation

Right: Statue in storage after deinstallation

Object Date

c.1816-1827

Materials

Carrara marble statue, Limestone base

Dimensions

Weight: 6.5 tons (pedestal), 9 tons (statue)

Height: 6'10" (pedestal), 10' (statue)

Scope

L.Liparini Studio & Third Coast Conservation (LTC) was asked to provide a preliminary assessment of structural and surface conditions of the statue Louis XVI in Louisville, Kentucky, and to propose treatment and preservation options for the statue. The statue was located at the corner of 6th and Jefferson, outside of the Louisville Metro Hall, a governmental building prior to its removal.

At the time of examination the statue had been disassembled from the plinth, was strapped within a steel rigging mount and in a city warehouse. LTC conservators performed a visual inspection, took photography, and performed minor treatment testing in non-descript and representative areas, including on fragments that had broken off of the statue.

Condition & Timeline

1780 This city was named Louisville in 1780 because of King Louis XVI's support of the American colonies in the revolutionary war.

1827-1829 The statue was sculpted by Achille-Joseph-Etienne Valois. It was commissioned by King Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette's daughter Marie-Thérèse and given to Montpellier in France in 1829 after a visit. It stood in the town square for less than a year, as another ruling branch had taken over. The statue was placed in a military facility storage.

1899 It was until 1899 when discovered by a military officer. It was gifted to the city's mayor, who passed it to the museum at the city's university, then moved to the basement of the city's municipal archives building.

1966 City officials in Montpellier, Louisville's first sister city, decided to give it to Louisville as a gesture of friendship, and it was shipped by way of US Navy cargo ship.

1967 The statue was installed and dedicated. Monument company Reihm created plaster casts of the right hand and left foot.

1974 The left foot was replaced as it had come loose.

1990's A local newspaper noted a long crack in the cloak, areas chipped, two toes missing from one of the cherubs.

2004 A significant restoration including extensive cleaning and replacement of missing elements completed by Venus Bronze Works / CASO-IMPEX (Conservation of Artistic Stone Objects); conservator noted structural cracks and recommended a consolidation, which was not performed.

2020 This statue was damaged in **May-August** during protests in regards to the police-involved shooting death of Breonna Taylor (**March 13th, 2020**), as well as additional protests in part of the local and national racial justice movement. It is noted on LouisvilleKy.gov and in conversation with City staff that after being vandalized with orange spray paint the statue was overcleaned by power washing, which damaged the surface of the marble and contributed to possible structural instability. Cracks in the cloak, (behind figure's left elbow in the image to the right), as well as on the back of the cloak were also reported present. The statue was spray painted in various colors including black, green, red, and purple, with eggs being thrown at the statue, and the hand broken off (which was later found).

On September 3rd, the statue was removed and placed in an outdoor storage space, and then subsequently transferred to an indoor storage space for assessment by several conservation firms and the decision-making process.

2021 **June 18th** site visit by Third Coast Conservation



Statue stored in the archives building of Montpellier, France. *Courier Journal* File Photo



Statue with orange graffiti, prior to power washing. *Louisville City staff*.

Sources

"Louis XVI Timeline", LouisvilleKy.gov. n.d. <https://louisvilleky.gov/government/arts-culture/louis-xvi>

"Everything to know about Louisville's most famous regift: The King Louis XVI statue", Matthew Glowicki. *Courier Journal*, December 26, 2017. <https://www.courier-journal.com/story/news/local/2017/12/26/king-louis-xvi-statue-louisville/870206001/>

Assessment

The following assessment is of the current condition of the statue, and not a report of damage incurred strictly during the protests, as a full condition assessment prior to the protests has not been conducted.

STRUCTURAL

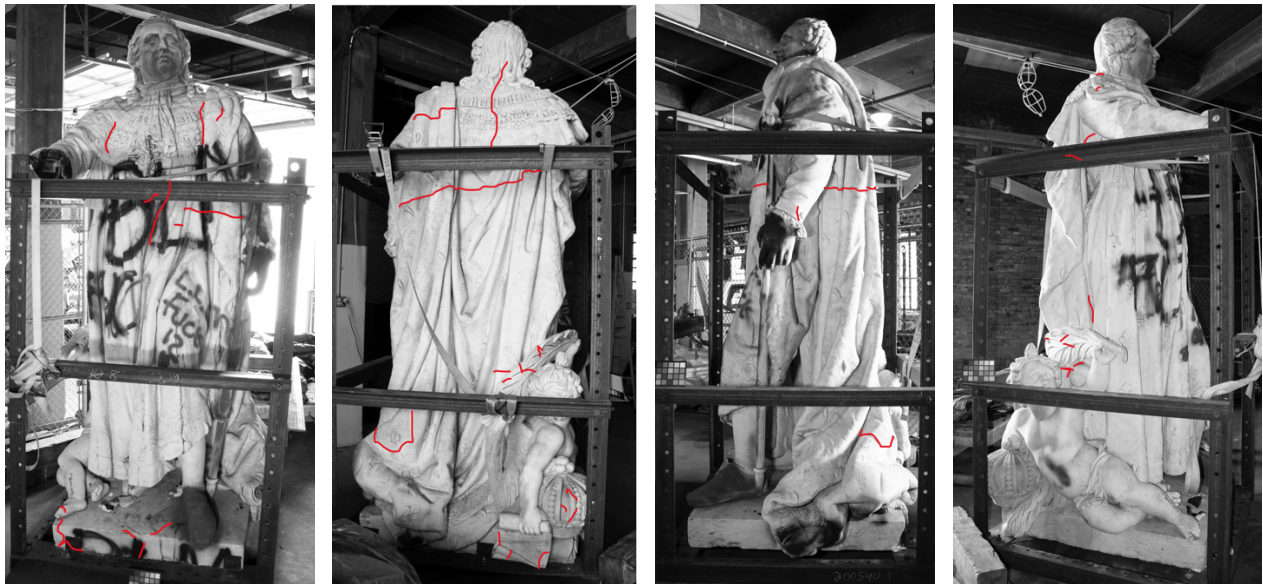
The structural integrity of the statue was assessed with a visual examination. While many structural issues were visually apparent, it is noted that additional assessment with advanced Non Destructive Testing (NDT) would be recommended if the object were to return to outdoor public use. The conservator can recommend structural engineering firms capable of further analysis.

The 2004 treatment report by CASO-IMPEX provides some clues to both the statue's structural history, as well as some information as to why the statue is in poor condition now:

Some notable information is as follows:

- **Structural crack treatment:** Surface and structural cracks were filled with a compound of white Thorite 200 cement, marble powder, Jahns replica marble, zinc oxide, and acrylic pigments. It does not appear that a consolidation of these cracks was performed to improve their structural integrity.
- **New marble restorations:** 11 dutchmen repairs were completed with steel pins of missing elements including the cherub's finger and toe, elements of the crown, ornamental leaf elements.
- **Mortar repairs:** Discolored mortar and pointing from previous (undocumented) repairs was removed and replaced with compounds including Thorite 400, a cement-based, polymer modified patching material with Acryl 60, material meant for the repair of concrete and masonry architectural substrates and may not have been appropriate for marble.
- **Surface treatment:** The surface was cleaned with Triton X100, Enviro clean, and then Mora Poultice AB57; the conservator did not mention how they cleared all of the chemicals from the surface. The poultice has since been found to be too aggressive for marble works of art, as notably discussed in <http://artwatch.org.uk/tag/the-mora-poultice/>. This aggressive cleaning, without further consolidation of the surface as the conservator recommended, paired with the power washing, has likely left the marble more susceptible to water ingress resulting in damage from freeze thaw over time.
- **Maintenance recommendations:** CASO-IMPEX recommended washing and rinsing the statue every 2 years – it is believed that this maintenance has not been followed.
- **Consolidation recommendations:** CASO-IMPEX also stated that the current state of stone decay did not require consolidation, but that that process should be completed within the next few years. To the best of the City staff knowledge, this was not performed. Examination with UV lights did not reveal evidence of applied surface coatings or consolidants in crack areas.

Preliminary maps of cracking, flaws, and repairs are indicated in red on the diagrams to follow. Many of the cracks are likely inherent to the marble and have naturally released over time. These may have been exacerbated over time with movement. It is concerning that the horizontal flaws are most significant above the areas where the cloak has a more pronounced relief, and are paired with some vertical flaws in the adjacent areas. It is the conservator's concern that there may be a catastrophic failure within the cloak element and someone nearby may be severely injured.



Preliminary map of cracks and break edges (in red) visible on the front, back, proper left, and proper right

Other structural condition issues noted include:

- The proper right hand was detached from the figure during a protest. This broke off cleanly from a dutchman repair.
- The pointer finger from the cherub's left hand missing
- The crown element that the cherub is leaning on has been damaged by the steel beams of the transportation mount with accompanying losses
- Elements of the figure's proper left cuffs have broken off, as well as along the figure's proper right shoulder
- The underside appears to be only supported along a few inches along the front and back edges, and has shifted. The statue is thus not adequately supported and additional damage has occurred around the edges/corners. More damage will likely occur with no additional modification to the mount and underside support.
- There are surface abrasions throughout



Left: Area of the crown that has been pressed against the steel mount and has produced losses



Middle: Break edges where elements of the cuff are broken off



Right: Area of damage due to the statue shifting on the mount

- The surface had had significant loss over time due to weathering, resulting in a roughened surface with some areas of sugaring. Much of the roughening is actually along the bottom half, which is likely due to power washing and public interaction without protection. This can be demonstrated by the detail of the carving of the fleur-de-leis along the bottom compared with the top as shown below.



Left: Lower area of cloak, fleur-de-leis where carving and surrounding surfaces appear to have been previously power washed, reducing the definition of the carving

Right: a fleur-de-lis closer to the top where the definition of the carving is much more prominent and the surface smoother

SURFACE CONDITIONS

On the surface, the predominant issue is that the statue has been graffitied with spray paint and hit with eggs as well as an additional unknown substance that seems to have produced a white etching in the surfaces of the paint surface as it dripped down. It does not appear that any anti-graffiti coatings have been applied to the statue previously. Additional issues include:

- Ghosting from previously removed graffiti
- There is a minor amount of biological activity on the object, including spider webs and hornet/wasp nests.
- There are minor black encrustations from pollutants on the surface, particularly along crevices and interior surfaces



Images demonstrating areas of graffiti, egg, and areas of white/etched surfaces on top of the paint

TREATMENT TESTING

Testing for graffiti removal was performed on fragments that had detached from the statue. It should be noted that these are only preliminary tests, and that extensive testing on each area should be conducted as different surfaces may require different methodologies due to previous interventions and the fragility of each area. Solvent combinations should be tested and evaluated under the microscope to ensure no discoloration of the stone, and as complete a removal as possible.

Tests included cotton swabbing with free solvents and the use of solvent poultices of acetone, ethyl alcohol, isopropanol, xylene, and n-methyl-2-pyrrolidone (NMP). The commercial graffiti remover Elephant Snot was also tested.

The solvents, particularly acetone, were effective in solubilizing the black and purple graffiti, which is likely acrylic based; the red graffiti proved more indurate, potentially an alkyd paint. Elephant Snot, followed with water, was also effective, but is a very aggressive product and potassium hydroxide based products can leave residues that if not cleared, can harm the stone over time.

Additional solvents and combinations that could be tried in the future include methyl ethyl ketone, n-butyl acetate, cyclohexane, and ShellSol D40. Once the exact solubility is determined, low-toxic ternary solvent mixtures can be produced to provide a more environmentally and practitioner friendly solution.

The egg residue was effectively washed with distilled water and a soft bristle brush. Thorough rinsing and washing should be performed to reduce the possibility of staining in the future if not all of the residue was removed. The egg residue, where it had previously been washed off, can be visible under ultraviolet light. This method can help determine if the residues have been thoroughly removed or not.



Left: Areas of graffiti removal - note multiple campaigns of removal would be required to remove as much of the paint as possible
Right: Areas where the egg has been removed from the surface with water – note full removal would require thorough washing, rinsing, and likely the use of some steam

IMAGES

Images from the site visit and all testing have been provided via a Google Drive Link to City staff.

Preservation & Treatment Recommendations

ETHICAL & CONCEPTUAL CONCERNS

The American Institute for the Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (AIC) provides a Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Practice to professional conservators. These documents require the conservation professional to be governed by an “informed respect for the cultural property, its unique character and significance” as well as serving as an advocate for the preservation of cultural property. It is imperative that conservators consider the ethical implications of any treatment we undergo.

American Institute for Conservation, Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Practice can be found at the following link:
https://www.culturalheritage.org/docs/default-source/administration/governance/code-of-ethics-and-guidelines-for-practice.pdf?sfvrsn=ca344aed_21

In 2020, the AIC published a position statement on Contested and Confederate Monuments. This position indicates that **“It is imperative that anyone involved in decision-making about a contested monument consider the history and context of the work in question and encourage, if not insist upon, the inclusion of stakeholder communities.”**

This statue is considered a Contested Monument due to its depiction of a monarch, its presence in a Community Space, community calls for its removal, in addition to it bearing witness to the Breonna Taylor and Black Lives Matter protests of 2020. The conservator also recognizes that this statue is important to the city of Louisville and the descendants of Louis XVI, as well as being a gift from Montpellier France.

Furthermore, the position indicates that **“Regardless of the decisions made about a contested monument, conservation professionals have a responsibility to design a course of treatment in keeping with community consensus and according to best conservation practices. The preservation of a monument may include preserving damage such as vandalism done in the name of social justice, since historical precedent indicates that defacement often becomes part of the meaning of the work.”**

The AIC Position Statement on Contested and Confederate Monuments can be found at the following link:
https://www.culturalheritage.org/docs/default-source/administration/governance/aic-positionstatement-contested-monuments-2020.pdf?sfvrsn=e83c0b20_8

With these perspectives and guidelines in mind, the conservator believes very careful and deliberate decisions should be made with respect to any treatment of this statue. The removal of the graffiti and rectification of lost elements is not an emergency and does provide the City with time and opportunity to engage the community in having an educated, scholarly, community-centric discussion as to what to do with the statue. An important stakeholder in that discussion would include Black Lives Matter. This time provides room to think creatively and thoughtfully about recontextualizing the statue and provide opportunity for artist and community engagement to re-envision the public space this statue previously occupied.

TREATMENT OPTIONS

It is currently advised to structurally support and care for the statue in its current vandalized form, enabling the statue to not be destroyed and thus preserved for community discussion regarding its future siting or treatment.

It should be reiterated that it is highly recommended a structural engineering firm evaluate its stability, regardless of the statue going indoors or outdoors. Due to the surface conditions, and the statue's history as a Contested Monument, it is highly recommended this object remain indoors.

Preliminary Support and Stabilization

The statue does not appear to be adequately structurally supported on the underside, contributing to continual damage. A professional art handler should be hired to raise the statue within its current frame and add in sheets of steel and/or additional beams to support the underside.

Additionally, the statue should be vacuumed to remove dust, dirt, and biological debris, and covered with a dust covering with air ventilation for high humidity environments. The fragments should be collected so that they do not get disassociated.

Potential Future Treatment Options

Options for future treatment, whether it be the retention of or removal of the graffiti, should be considered with the full involvement of stakeholder communities, including Black Lives Matter. There are a variety of treatment options that may preserve the statue in its original form, along with the vandalism, thus enabling options to return it fully to its former state at a later date. These include may include simply maintaining the statue as is for now; utilizing a reversible coating and covering the graffiti in whole or in part; Utilizing reversible methods to add to or modify the statue with community members or artists.

Cost Estimates

At this time, without the clear indication of a community consensus on the treatment plan, a cost is not provided for any potential treatment steps. The conservator would be happy to advise on any structural support to be deployed by a qualified Art Handler or to be on-site to work with the Art Handler, as well as on vacuuming and covering the statue for storage. The conservator would also be happy to participate in community discussions regarding treatment options and can provide a schedule of fees associated with those visits. The cost of additional 1-day site visits would be comparable to the cost of the assessment site visit.

The only clear potential treatment option would be for complete removal of the spray paint, of which the conservator does not find appropriate at this time. Additionally, the conservator believes the best equipment for full removal of such extensive spray paint would be with the use of solvent cleaning delivered by poultice, followed by laser cleaning by a qualified practitioner. Third Coast Conservation does not currently provide laser cleaning services.

This option is detailed further in the 2020 publication: *Developing New Cleaning Strategies of Cultural Heritage Stones: Are Synergistic Combinations of a Low-Toxic Solvent Ternary Mixtures Followed by Laser the Solution?* By Chiara Ricci 1,2,* , Francesca Gambino 1, Marco Nervo 1, Anna Piccirillo